



U9 Half-Ice

Development Manual

Welcome Message to U9 Hockey Coaches

This Manual has been created as a resource for you, **the Coach**, to utilize during the hockey season. Hockey Manitoba has brought significant rule changes to the U9 age group that will help enhance player development and the overall experience of playing hockey. In order to make the U9 half-ice program as successful as possible, this Manual will serve as a guide to all U9 hockey coaches. By familiarizing yourself with the contents of this Manual, we hope that you will be prepared to lead your team into the upcoming season.

In conjunction with Hockey Manitoba and Hockey Canada, Hockey Winnipeg has created this Manual as a resource to outline Hockey Manitoba's Under-9 half-ice guidelines, the benefits to the half-ice game, and information on player development for U9 hockey players. You will also find resources that will help you plan practices and deliver fun and age-appropriate activities in the Development Zone.

Hockey Winnipeg would like to thank you for being directly involved with the U9 program this season. **We would like to remind all coaches, parents, administrators, and everyone else involved in the U9 program that the goal at this stage is for the young players to have fun, be active, be involved, and develop their athletic skills. Remember: Organized minor hockey is an opportunity for children to encounter positive experiences that will result in long-term involvement in sport and physical activity.**

Table of Contents

• Hockey Manitoba Under-9 Half-Ice Guidelines.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Rationale.....	6
Scheduling.....	6
Practices.....	7
Roster size.....	7
Equipment & set up.....	7
Warm-up.....	8
Basic rules.....	8
Continuous play & change of possession.....	8
Penalties.....	9
Game outline.....	9
Development zone.....	10
Player rotations.....	10
Officials.....	11
Tournament play.....	11
Transition season.....	12
Growth & Development FAQs.....	12
• Half-Ice Benefits.....	14
• Hockey Canada Player Development.....	17
Developing all positions.....	18
• Coach Responsibilities.....	19
Hockey Canada’s fair play code for coaches.....	20

• Development Zone Resource for Coaches.....	21
11 tips for coaches in the Development Zone.....	22
Development Zone Activities.....	23
• Practice Planning Resource for Coaches.....	32
Hockey Canada drill hub.....	32
Hockey Canada network app.....	32
• Important Rules for Under-9 Hockey Parents.....	34
• Conclusion.....	36

Hockey Manitoba Under-9 Half-Ice Guidelines

Introduction

All players in the Under-9 age category will play on a half-ice surface for the duration of the season. This continues Hockey Manitoba's Under-9 half-ice program originally developed in 2017 - 2018 and continued in 2018 - 2019. Under-9 half-ice hockey has now been mandated across the country by Hockey Canada. Minor Hockey Association volunteers and administrators are encouraged to review this document carefully, which incorporates concepts and non-negotiables from Hockey Canada's guidelines as well as specific guidelines created by Hockey Manitoba. **All Minor Hockey Associations and leagues in Manitoba are required to follow Hockey Manitoba's Under-9 half-ice guidelines.** The first years of hockey need to be a positive experience. A fun and exciting start gives young players the opportunity to enjoy hockey for life! If a beginner has fun, develops basic skills and builds confidence, there is a better chance they will enjoy themselves. But if the early experience is unrewarding, they may never discover all Canada's game has to offer.

U9 hockey should be delivered through a progressive, learn-to-play teaching curriculum for 7- and 8-year-olds. Children learn best through practice drills and skill sessions, as well as informal games like shinny, freeze tag and obstacle courses. The skills of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are introduced and refined one step at a time. The focus should always be on fun and skill development, but the early years of hockey should also allow youngsters to experience fitness, fair play and cooperation. To ensure a positive experience, a coaching clinic has been designed for the on-ice coaches that focuses on communication, teaching skills, leadership, skill analysis, lesson organization, and safety and risk management.

Program Goals

- To have fun while playing hockey and engaging in physical activity
- To learn the fundamental skills required to play the game of hockey
- To develop and refine basic motor patterns
- To be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and fair play

Hockey Canada wants every Canadian youngster to have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from a program designed to meet their specific needs, one that ensures progressive skill development through well-delivered practice sessions and age-appropriate game play in an environment suited to their skill level. U9 hockey serves as the foundation upon which the entire hockey experience is built. It is a crucial piece in building the skills of players at every level – players benefit from getting the 'right start' in the game.

Hockey is amongst one of the last sports to consider "area of play" modifications. With Sport Canada's focus on the long-term development of athletes we have been exposed to the modification of many of the other major sports in Canada. Picture this: A 7-year-old soccer player playing on a World Cup field. Or an 8-year-old baseball player standing at home plate with a pitcher 60 feet, 6 inches away at Winnipeg Goldeyes Field. A basketball court with 10-foot baskets. A 7-year-old on the goal line looking to the other end at Investor's Group Field. Placing our 7 and 8-year-old players on an ice surface similar or equivalent to what players in the NHL play on is a disadvantage to our athletes. Our collective focus is to create an age appropriate, healthy, and inclusive environment where all players can develop skills and have fun as they grow in our game.

We believe these modifications will benefit every participant and we will support our players, coaches, officials and administrators with a well-structured program. We ask everyone to approach this continued change with an open mind and support our direction in a positive manner to allow our players to learn the game in this exciting progressive direction.

Rationale

Players at the Under-9 level require a continued focus on physical literacy while also beginning to develop some of the more advanced individual skills inherent in the game. By moving from cross-ice at U7 to half-ice at U9, we increase the size of the ice surface in accordance with the increase in the size of player. This modified ice will continue to provide players with an environment that is more inclusive, competitive, and conducive to skill development through puck touches and puck control, shots, passes completed, transitions, decision making, puck support, overall involvement...and FUN!

The following Under-9 half-ice guidelines have been developed to assist our Minor Hockey Associations and Community Clubs with the implementation of half-ice hockey in the Under-9 age category. This will ensure a consistent, organized delivery model across the province.

Information on Hockey Canada's Under-9 Guidelines can be found at the link below, however please note HOCKEY MANITOBA HAS MADE SOME MODIFICATIONS which are outlined in this document.

<http://www.hockeymanitoba.ca/players/under-9-hockey/>

Scheduling

Minor Hockey Associations and leagues are strongly encouraged to schedule Under-9 half-ice games in succession whenever possible to allow for fluid transition between games. Ideally this

group of U9 half-ice games would also follow a group of U7 cross-ice games to limit the movement of rink dividers.

Practices

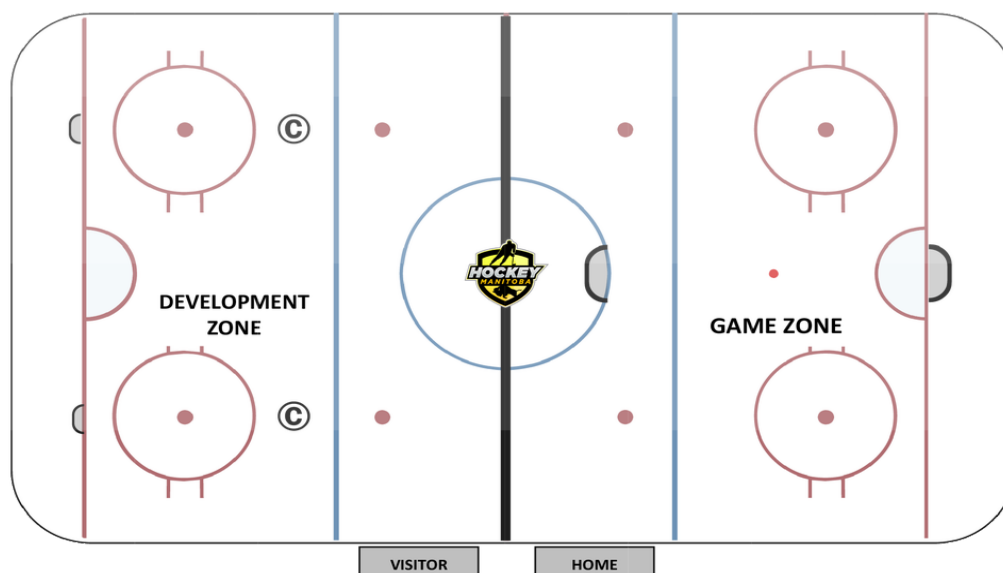
To maintain the concepts of long-term player development and modified ice, practices at the Under-9 level should be on half-ice whenever possible. This allows for the focus to be on skill development and competitive games in small, modified spaces rather than full-ice flow drills or team tactics. In addition, this will save your team/association money!

Roster size

Although Hockey Manitoba understands there are challenges in consistent roster sizes across the branch, when possible team rosters should consist of 12 skaters plus one (1) rotating goalie (your team can use shared equipment!). This ensures utilization of the Development Zone and equal and adequate rest time for all players. A minimum of 10 skaters is recommended.

Equipment & set-up

- One rink divider across the centre red line (or set of boards).
- Two full size (6' x 4') or junior size nets (4' x 3') nets in Game Zone.
- Two mini nets (3' x 2') utilized in Development Zone (can also be be junior or full size).



Warm-up

A three-minute warm up will take place prior to each game, and will begin once set up for the half-ice game is complete. The home team will utilize the Game Zone for its warm-up, the visiting team will utilize the Development Zone.

Basic rules

These are the basic rules regarding the format and structure for Under-9 half-ice games:

- Teams use their own bench for the duration of the half-ice game (if agreed, teams may share one bench).
- The half-ice game will be played 4 vs 4 (skaters) and 1 goalie from each team.
- Games are 2 x 24-minute periods (teams switch ends after 1st period). The visiting team defends the net on the centre red line in the 1st period. Officials will draw a dot in the middle of the Game Zone for all face-offs.
- Each team has 8 players in the Game Zone at all times (4 on the ice, 4 on the bench). The remaining players are in the Development Zone.
- Shifts are 2 minutes, running time; continuous play within each shift (see below). Buzzer sounds once at the end of each 2-minute shift, however clock continues to run.
- After a 4-shift segment (8 minutes), clock is stopped and buzzer is sounded to signify player rotations. Each team rotates new players into the Development Zone for the next segment.
- There are NO icing or offside calls.
- Score will be kept; however goals and assists will not be recorded. Goalies may only be pulled in the last shift of any game.
- Players and coaches shake hands after the game.

Continuous play & change of possession

As identified by Hockey Canada as a core element at the Under-9 category, one of the keys to improving the flow of each game and reducing stoppages is to create continuous play, particularly on change of possession. These basic rules apply:

- There will be no face-offs or lengthy stoppages in play during shifts; continuous play will be used (exception for injury).
- Puck shot out of play: Official blows whistle, offending team backs off and non-offending team gets possession.
- Goalie freezes puck: Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession.
- Goal scored: Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession.

Note: In all cases, “backing off” will require the offensive team to move back to the ringette line (or top of circles). The defensive team must wait for the official to indicate they can begin their attack, and must start with the puck on or behind their goal line. Both teams resume play on the officials’ signal. Coaches should ensure all players understand this concept from both the offensive and defensive perspective.

Penalties

The following guidelines apply to minor penalties during U9 half-ice games:

- Standard delayed penalty procedures are followed (note: goalie can’t be pulled during delay).
- The official calling the penalty blows whistle, identifies offending player and penalty.
- Offending player is escorted to player bench by the official who called the penalty.
- The 2nd official gives possession to the non-offending team (offending team must back off).
- The offending player is eligible to return during the same shift if a goal is scored by the non-offending team.

Game outline

The following is an outline of a standard half-ice game:

<u>Period 1</u>		<u>Period 2</u>	
<u>Time</u>	<u>Shift #</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Shift #</u>
24:00	1	24:00	13
22:00	2	22:00	14
20:00	3	20:00	15
18:00	4	18:00	16
<i>ROTATION AT 16:00</i>		<i>ROTATION AT 16:00</i>	
16:00	5	16:00	17
14:00	6	14:00	18
12:00	7	12:00	19
10:00	8	10:00	20
<i>ROTATION AT 8:00</i>		<i>ROTATION AT 8:00</i>	
8:00	9	8:00	21

6:00	10	6:00	22
4:00	11	4:00	23
2:00	12	2:00	24

ROTATION AT 0:00

END OF GAME

Development zone

The purpose of the Development Zone is to maximize ice usage, while providing additional age appropriate skill development using drills and competitive game opportunities for players. It also provides on-ice coaches (1 from each team) teaching, instructional and mentorship opportunities. Use of the Development Zone will create approx. 30-40% more ice time for players compared to traditional formats. Basic rules for the Development Zone are:

- Use of the Development Zone is MANDATORY during all exhibition, regular season and playoff games.
- With 8 skaters in the Game Zone at all times, the remaining skaters will be in the Development Zone.
- Development Zone will focus on both skill development (drills) and competition (small area games).
- One coach from each team is required to be on the ice (coaches should be rotated from game to game).
- Each Development Zone “segment” will be 8 minutes in length.
- Mini nets are recommended for use, however full-sized nets can be used.
- The number of players in the Development Zone will vary, depending on each team’s numbers.

If coaches are not available, regions, leagues and/or associations may train appropriate aged players (must be registered members of Hockey Manitoba) to run Development Zone activities (U15 or U18 players for example). However, these players should understand the appropriate concepts being taught and given adequate support to ensure safety and productivity in the Development Zone.

Hockey Manitoba has created a DEVELOPMENT ZONE SEASONAL PLAN for all Under-9 coaches in Manitoba. This includes a game to game outline of specific drills and small area games to be utilized. Progressions and key teaching points will also be included. The plan includes transitional drills at the end of the season to introduce concepts such as off-sides and icings.

Player rotations

Players will rotate between the Game Zone and Development Zone after each 8-minute segment. The timekeeper will sound the buzzer at the end of each 8-minute segment to identify

rotations. There are 8 players in the Game Zone at all times (4 on the ice, 4 on the bench), and the additional players will be in the Development Zone. Coaches simply rotate new players into the Development Zone after each 8-minute segment. This rotation **MUST** be done fairly to ensure all players receive as equal time in the Game Zone and Development Zone as possible for every game. Example:

- Team with 10 skaters = 2 players in Development Zone
- Team with 11 skaters = 3 players in Development Zone
- Team with 12 skaters = 4 players in Development Zone

Note: Teams that have less than 10 or more than 12 skaters at any game can determine the appropriate method of utilizing the Development Zone in accordance with their Minor Hockey Association.

Coaches should meet before each game to discuss equal ability line combinations. For example, both teams could ensure their more developed players are on the ice for the 1st and 3rd shift, and the less developed players are on the ice for the 2nd and 4th shift for each segment (or vice versa).

Officials

The half-ice game will be run by 2 officials who will be responsible for face-offs, goal determination, penalties, etc. while working on fundamentals such as skating, positioning and communication. This will assist young officials in building confidence and experience, reacting “with” the play rather than “to” it, while creating a foundation to take with them into full-ice games at the U11 level and beyond. Hockey Manitoba includes officials’ half-ice procedures at all Level 1 officiating clinics, which will also be circulated to all Minor Hockey Associations. Officials will continue to learn about offside, icing and other full-ice rules at their clinics.

Please be supportive and respectful to our young officials!

Tournament play

Hockey Manitoba will allow certain modifications to its Under-9 half-ice program for sanctioned tournaments, at the discretion of the tournament organizer. All half-ice game rules will apply, however the Development Zone will be optional. Options for Under-9 tournament play are as follows:

- Standard half-ice game, use of Development Zone (2 teams)
- Standard half-ice game, no use of Development Zone (2 teams)
- 2 half-ice games simultaneously (4 teams)

Note: Teams will be required to share benches if running 2 half-ice games simultaneously.

Transition season

Hockey Manitoba recognizes that it may be beneficial for graduating U9 players to be introduced to the full-ice game prior to their first year of U11 hockey. The Transition Season will provide this opportunity and the ability for players to learn basic rules such as off-sides and icing, along with introductory positional play and face-offs.

Regulations and basic rules for the Transition Season are as follows:

- Games will be played on full-ice with standard Hockey Canada rules in affect.
- All players must be 8 years old as of December 31 (no underage or overage players allowed).
- A "home center" and host association must be declared for registration purposes.
- All players must have been registered and participated in the winter Under-9 program.
- Players can only register and play with one Transition Season team.
- The program is inclusive, therefore no "cuts" are allowed.
- Teams must be rostered in accordance with Hockey Manitoba regulations (including coach certification).
- Teams may only play in Hockey Canada or USA Hockey sanctioned activities.
- There can be no on-ice activity until the regular season (including playoffs) is completed for all players.
- The Transition Season can operate from March 1st (earliest) until April 30th.
- Associations must submit a fee of \$50 (plus GST) for each Transition Season team to Hockey Manitoba.
- All other fees, schedules, ice times, etc. are at the discretion of the Association and/or Region.

Note: The Transition Season is an OPTIONAL program; Regions and/or Associations will make this decision.

Growth & Development FAQs

Why are there so many recent changes to the Under-9 Program?

Hockey Manitoba has extensively reviewed its Under-9 half-ice program from inception in 2017 - 2018 and into the 2018 - 2019 season. Hockey Canada has now made half-ice mandatory across the country, and Hockey Manitoba has incorporated key concepts from the national model in addition to some modifications for the benefit of player development. We believe our model utilizes the best components of each - with a focus on development and engagement at its core - while also ensuring we recognize Hockey Canada's core elements at this age level.

Does my player regress by having to play half-ice at 7 or 8 years old?

No, research shows that players benefit more (and have more fun) by playing in an age appropriate environment (half-ice). All players benefit from increased puck touches, scoring chances, quick transitions, read & react situations, puck support and passing plays in half-ice hockey. Physical literacy and skill acquisition are the cornerstones of development at this age. Learning game rules (offside, icing) will come in time.

Some 8-year-old players are very big; what about incidental contact and collisions?

Incidental contact and collisions will always be part of the game and are unavoidable any time you have players around the puck, however the reduction in the playing area from full-ice to half-ice will force players to accelerate their thought process and reaction times.

With a reduced ice surface, won't this have a negative impact on skating development?

Quite the opposite. Hockey is no longer a linear game and skating is much more than simply moving in a straight line. The reduction of the ice surface will again help to develop players' complete skating skills which include stops and starts, transitions, turning, pivots, agility, edge work and balance. Good skaters will always be good skaters but playing in a half-ice concept will assist in the development of every player's skating acumen rather than primarily relying on or limiting their skating arsenal to full acceleration. In addition, a study conducted by Hockey Alberta found that young players can reach top speeds in a distance less than half of the ice, therefore we are confident that half-ice games will improve rather than handicap players' skating skills. Hockey Canada studies support this research.

Will there be increased whistles with the reduction of the ice surface, and pucks shot over the divider(s)?

With the removal of off-sides and icings, and the modification to continuous play within shifts, there will essentially be no stoppages of play during games. The result is continuous, competitive play and engagement. Trials have shown that the amount of pucks shot over the divider(s) is very limited.

Why has a 4 vs. 4 model been implemented, don't players need to learn positions?

The 4 vs. 4 model follows Hockey Canada's core requirements for the Under-9 program, and was designed to maximize the opportunity to engage all players in the game. Age appropriate training at the Under-9 level includes fundamental skill development and competition. Introductory concepts to positional play such as puck support are key in a 4 vs. 4 half-ice game, however learning specific positions should not be introduced until U11.

Half-Ice Benefits

Hockey Winnipeg shares the same philosophy as Hockey Manitoba when it comes to the value of skill development and the responsibility that we have to our U9 hockey players. We feel that by making the change to the size appropriate playing area and by properly utilizing the Development Zone, we can make U9 hockey more fun and improve the development of our players. Several other notable hockey figures also believe in and promote the benefits of half-ice hockey:

“You have to be able to make plays in pretty small areas. The more you practice in small spaces the better off you are.” – Sidney Crosby, Canada’s National Men’s Team

“You need to be able to make quick passes and have quick communication. Small area games are important.” – Brianne Jenner, Canada’s National Women’s Team

“Kids can have a riot and there’s more goal scoring and there’s more touches. When you think about the National Hockey League, at the best league, some of the guys hardly touch the puck. They don’t have it on their stick forever. That’s why you need all these games and touches so you can advance your skill. I think it’s the greatest thing going.” – Mike Babcock, Canada’s National Men’s Team

Research has proven that putting young athletes into unsuitable environments too early will compromise their development. Children should only be placed into competitive situations that reflect their age, physical maturity, skill level, and abilities. It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice and half-ice hockey and why Hockey Canada has a national policy ensuring all U7 and U9 hockey is played in smaller, modified spaces.

Benefits Using a Smaller Ice Surface:

1. More efficient use of ice time and, as a result, more ice time for young players.
2. Allows more kids to be on the ice at the same time.
3. Increases the use of the core skating skills (ABCs – agility, balance, coordination).
4. Focuses on lateral movements, stops and starts, changes of direction.
5. Increases the number of puck touches per player.
6. Provides a better environment for teaching ice awareness and hockey sense.

7. Puts players in a position where they need to read the play and react to pressure quickly.
8. Improves abilities to avoid checks and puck protection skills.
9. Promotes stronger passing, pass receiving, and puck support skills.
10. Allows young goaltenders, when introduced, to experience more game-like action.
11. Builds confidence of lesser-skilled players because they are more involved in play.
12. Creates a stronger challenge for the more advanced players by having them face more opposition on a smaller playing surface.
13. The best players are challenged simply by the fact that others get in their way in a smaller area, forcing them to change direction, protect the puck and play in traffic instead of avoiding it.

Check the Statistics: In 2014, the National Hockey League (NHL) data-analytics division brought their professional expertise and technology to Detroit and gathered data from children 8 years of age and younger who had experienced playing on both a full-ice and a small ice sheet. They found:

1. **6x more shots on goal per player** - A very large difference between full-ice and small areas:
With players being closer to the puck at all times, the puck naturally finds its way to the net more often. This is beneficial to both players and goalies for a variety of reasons.
2. **5x more passes received per player** - Short, quick passes find their mark:
In smaller spaces, more passes are attempted – most of which are 5 to 10 feet in length. When passes are shorter, accuracy improves and players have more success receiving the pass. Players also start to understand the importance of team puck possession.
3. **2x more pass attempts per player** - More of a team game is apparent:
Smaller areas are conducive to passing and attempting to pass the puck more often. This is for two reasons: a) All players are close enough to pressure the puck more frequently, and b) Teammates are in close support of the puck carrier at all times.
4. **2x more puck touches per player** - Small spaces equate to more engagement in the play:
All players are close to the play at all times and have much more opportunity for puck touches. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, their opportunities to be engaged in the play are doubled when the playing area is smaller.
5. **2x more shot attempts per player** - Shrinking the playing surface increases offence:
Players are much closer to the net, skate shorter distance from goal to goal and have increased opportunities for offensive play, experimentation, and skill development.
6. **2x more puck battles per player** - More involvement and challenges:
Players of all skill level are faced with greater opportunities and difficulties due to smaller playing areas. With more players involved, more puck battles occur. This forces players to be aware and react to pressure as well as develop body-contact confidence.

7. **2x more change of direction pivots - Tight spaces means more transitions:**

Players have to change direction more often in a smaller area. Players therefore work on their lateral movements, stops and starts, and pivots with and without the puck. This in turn increases on-ice awareness, balance, agility, and coordination.

8. **1.75 shots/minute vs 0.45 shots/minute playing full ice - Benefits the goalies:**

The smaller ice allows players to shoot more often and forces goalies to be aware at all times. Goalies face more shots and must read/react quicker in the small area games.

A common misconception about half-ice hockey is that it will only serve to develop the players of the lowest skill level on the ice, while the players of the highest skill level will flat-line in their development. This is **NOT** the case. All players benefit from the increased amount of puck touches, the need to make decisions faster, and the added ice time.

The statistics that this study captured reveals a clear story: Kids who played on the smaller ice surface touched the puck more often, attempted more passes, and took twice the number of shots as kids who played on a full ice. Simply put, the numbers show that it works for all players on the ice and that it is beneficial for development.

The conclusion to take away is this: ALL kids who played on the smaller ice surface had a better opportunity to improve their skills and, more importantly, they had more FUN.

There's more: By adding the Development Zone to the Under-9 game experience, skaters will be able to stay on the ice to participate in skill development opportunities instead of waiting for multiple shifts in a row on the team bench. More ice-time and more repetitions mean increased development. The Development Zone gives players the chance to participate in small area activities which promote greater opportunity for skill-development (puck-handling, shooting, skating, passing, and coordination) and decision-making. Inevitably, this also improves every player's physical conditioning.

For players, time on the team bench observing their teammates in the Game Zone and receiving feedback from the coaches is a very important part of the game. Although this will still occur, the Development Zone will eliminate the times that players will have to spend consecutive shifts on the bench waiting to re-enter the play.

Hockey Canada Player Development

Hockey Canada has developed the Player Development Pyramid to help coaches lead players through the season. The emphasis in this model is the development of fundamental/technical skills which are the foundation of every player's success. As we move along the pyramid, emphasis is then placed on individual tactics; this is where "hockey sense" comes into play. Moving along the pyramid again, emphasis is placed upon learning team tactics. The team tactics are the basic systems that groups of players use to effectively play the game of hockey.



The Hockey Canada Skills Development Program recommends that Under-9 Hockey teams should spend %75 of their time practicing technical skills, %15 practicing individual tactics, and %10 practicing team tactics.

Technical Skills – the fundamental skills that are required to play the game (ex. skating, passing, shooting, stick handling, and checking).

Individual Tactics – actions by a player using one or a combination of technical skills in order to create an advantage or to take away the advantage of an opponent. A tactic may be classified as offensive or defensive (ex. 1-on-1 offensive fake and driving to the net).

Team Tactics – a collective action of two or more players using technical skills and/or individual tactics in order to create an advantage or take away the advantage of an opponent (ex. 3 vs. 2).

Note: It is important to remember that this stage is simply an introduction to team tactics. The majority of time needs to be spent on practicing individual skills in order for players to get maximum development.

Long Term Player Development for U9 Hockey Players: “FUNdamentals”

During this period, players continue to develop motor skills and coordination. Practice sessions should be held twice a week during the season. Ongoing participation in compatible sports is strongly encouraged. The U9 program is designed to promote the continued development of physical literacy, fitness, and the basic skills required to play hockey.

Remember, as a hockey coach you are playing an important role in the growth and development of young athletes. At the U9 age, children should be encouraged to participate in many different sports. Specializing in one sport at an early age is not conducive to becoming a well-rounded athlete and can potentially lead to burn out, overuse injuries, and not living an active and healthy lifestyle in the future.

Developing all positions

At the U9 level of hockey, it is important that players are able to develop at all positions. **Early specialization is not conducive to long term player development.** The coach should play an active role in making sure that both in games and in practices, U9 hockey players are trying all positions, including goalie.

At the U9 level, every player should get at least have the option of having one opportunity to play in Goal. Goaltender is not for everyone, but it is important for young individuals to experiment and see if they enjoy it. Exposure to all positions at this age is critical to the development of the overall hockey player. There are different skills used more and less frequently at each position and it is critical that all skills are developed equally. For example, if a U9 player never plays defence, they will not be honing their backwards skating skills. Therefore, U9 players should refrain from specific positional or role specialization as playing forward, defence, and goalie allows all players the opportunity to develop physical and cognitive skills that they can eventually apply into their primary position. As a result, they will increase their overall athletic skills, understand the game from multiple perspectives, and become better hockey players.

Note: Skill development is important for all players. Skating, puck control, passing and shooting are necessary pillars for all positions, including Goaltender.

Coach Responsibilities

The role of a coach is one that comes with a lot of responsibility. Generally, coaches need to keep the following at the top of mind:

- Creating a safe, positive and fun environment
- Focusing on development rather than winning
- Making a point of communicating with all players
- Being a role model
- Showing respect to players, parents, and officials

When it comes to U9 practices and Development Zone activities during U9 games, coaches should consider these two main principles:

1. Keep them moving - Ice sessions should be designed to engage every participant consistently. Kids don't want to stand still and watch others play. Kids enjoy hockey when they are active and experience an improvement in their overall skills.
2. Emphasize the fundamentals - Build a foundation that will never crack by properly teaching the basics. Learning the fundamentals and perfecting the same basics at every level of play is essential to having any chance of success. If one player does not execute the fundamentals of the game correctly, drills or plays will not work. U9 activities that focus on team play over executing fundamentals are cheating every participant out of the chance to learn the game properly.

Note: Do not attempt to replicate plays you see in NHL and junior hockey games. Every scheme that is attempted in a junior or NHL game is supported by years of training and practicing the fundamentals of the game.

To prepare your team for half-ice games, it is important to familiarize the U9 players with the entire game process. The following aspects of half-ice hockey should be considered before you begin your games:

- Ice surface layout
- Pre-game warmup
- Transitions between zones
- Having the team ready on time
- Helping arena staff and officials setting up and taking down the rink dividers
- Ensuring fair and equal ice time (Game Zone and Development Zone)

- Full utilization of Development Zone
- Being positive and encouraging to all players

Hockey Canada's fair play code for coaches:

1. I will be reasonable when scheduling games and practices, remembering that players have other interests and obligations.
2. I will teach my players to play fairly and to respect the rules, officials, and opponents.
3. I will ensure that all players get equal instruction, support, and playing time.
4. I will not ridicule or yell at my players for making mistakes or performing poorly.
5. I will remember that players play to have fun and must be encouraged to have confidence in themselves.
6. I will make sure that equipment and facilities are safe and match the players' ages and abilities.
7. I will remember that participants need a coach they can respect. I will be generous with praise and set a good example.
8. I will obtain proper training and continue to upgrade my coaching skills.
9. I will work in cooperation with officials for the benefit of the game.

Development Zone Resource for Coaches

The Zones: Each of the two zones (Game Zone and Development Zone) plays a vital role in the U9 game experience. The Game Zone will likely be the focal point for players, spectators, coaches on the benches, and is the only zone of responsibility for officials and timekeepers. The Development Zone, however, provides an opportunity for those players not in the Game Zone to stay active during the game and increase their development through small area activities.

Note: The Development Zone is not linked to the Game Zone and is there to serve as a positive environment where all players can have fun, be involved, stay active, and continue to work on and further develop their athletic skills. **The Development Zone should not be viewed as a practice. Rather, it is a chance for children to be creative, experiment, and enjoy developing confidence, competence, and the fundamentals of hockey through playing.**

Hockey Winnipeg recognizes the numerous advantages of incorporating and utilizing the Development Zone as much as possible. Therefore, Hockey Winnipeg has also included **Development Zone Activities** to be used during U9 games. By utilizing our activities, Hockey Winnipeg feels the Development Zone can:

1. Foster love and enjoyment for hockey and physical activity.
2. Provide an opportunity for U9 players to develop motor skills, balance, coordination, confidence, and the basic skills required to play hockey and become better athletes.
3. Provide age appropriate skill development opportunities to ensure U9 participants learn through play.
4. Create a unique environment that promotes creativity, experimentation, and fun.
5. Create an inclusive and competitive environment that will accelerate skill development in small areas.
6. Eliminate the need for traditional “conditioning” drills.
7. Stimulate technical and individual skill development for players of all positions.

Hockey Winnipeg has included these age appropriate Development Zone Activities to assist U9 players in continuing to develop physical literacy, fitness, and the five fundamentals of the game – skating, passing, shooting, stick handling, and checking – in a fun and appropriately competitive environment. We are hopeful that these activities will help local players acquire the knowledge, confidence, and skills that will translate to maintaining an active lifestyle and experiencing athletic success in the future. Please modify/alter these activities based on the number of players/goalies and type of equipment you have.

11 tips for coaches in the Development Zone:

1. At the beginning of each development zone session, take approximately 20-30 seconds to introduce yourself and explain the first segment's activity so there is no confusion among the players.
2. Make adaptations/changes to the activities frequently. Players are in the development zone for 8 minutes at a time and children can get bored quickly. But, when you make changes, stop the game and explain the new activity.
3. Take a knee and speak softly when explaining the activity. Encourage the players to lean right in close to you.
4. Don't speak too long. The development zone is meant to keep players active. But, demonstrating the activity when you make changes will give players a chance to rest.
5. Don't worry too much about technique at this point. Give them 1 to 2 teaching points maximum if you would like. Remember, these are 7 and 8-year-old children. They should be learning the fundamentals of hockey through playing activities (this is not a practice – this is an opportunity for kids to have fun, be creative, experiment, and continue to develop the fundamentals of hockey through playing).
6. Don't expect too much. Try to be patient, encouraging, and energetic.
7. Make sure all players are following the rules and have an equal amount of time participating in all positions in each of the development zone activities.
8. Ensure player safety as much as possible. Make sure players are keeping their heads up at all times and are aware of their surroundings. It is also very important to be aware of the players in the Game Zone who are changing from the ice to their benches.
9. If goalies are unavailable, make players hit posts or place objects/targets in the nets.
10. Start each activity, and each segment of the activity, with a faceoff. This will make it feel more like a game and give the kids another brief moment to rest.
11. Join in on the activity. If the players see you having fun and being engaged in the activity, they will have fun and be engaged in the activity too.

DEVELOPMENT ZONE ACTIVITIES

The Development Zone is a chance for children to be creative, experiment, and enjoy developing confidence, competence, and the fundamentals of hockey through playing.

Teamwork Activities

- Partner Stick Catch
- Stick Relay Race



Skill Check Activities

- Simon Says
- Red Light, Green Light

Activities with Pucks

- Chaos Drill
- Rabbit & Coyote
- Asteroids



Cross Ice Game Variations

- Jump The Lines
- Tic Tac Toe
- Forehand/Backhand Control
- Hot Puck
- Around The World
- Checking & Defending
- Gretzky's Office
- Regroup Game
- Cherry Picker
- Back-To-Back Game

Tag Variations

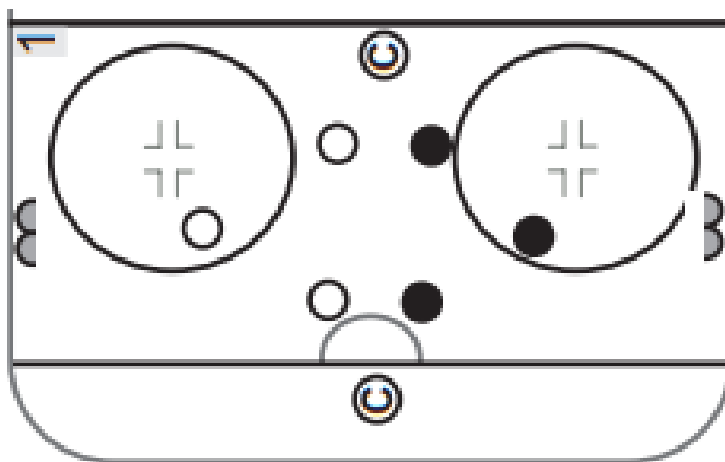
- British Bulldog
- Partner Tag
- Freeze Tag
- Skill Tag

"To play the game is good, to win is better,
but to love the game is best of all"

CROSS ICE GAMES

All players from each team are in the Development Zone and play a cross-ice game. Coaches implement different variations and rules to promote skill development.

Set Up: Place 2 nets on opposite sides of the ice. The coach drops the puck like a faceoff to begin each segment.



1) JUMP THE LINES:

Rule: All players can't touch the blue line, ringette line, and goal line with their skates at all times during the game. All players must jump with both feet (while they are either skating forward, backward, or side to side) over the 3 lines, with or without the puck, while they play.

Goal: Improve balance, agility, coordination, and promote fun.

Variation 1: Make the players jump only using one foot at a time. Switch legs after a couple minutes.

Variation 2: Make the players jump over the lines of the faceoff circles.

2) TIC TAC TOE:

Rule #1: Each team must make 2 passes before taking a shot on net. After a few minutes move on to the next rule.

Rule #2: Each team must make 3 passes before taking a shot on net.

Goal: Encourages players to keep their feet moving and get open for passes. A strong focus on keeping eyes up, good passing and play making.

Variation: Make players pass with only their backhands.

Tip: Make the players call for the pass – communication is key!

3) FOREHAND/BACKHAND CONTROL:

Rule #1: All players can only use the forehand of their stick blades at all times (carrying the puck, passing, receiving passes, and shooting). After a few minutes move on to the next rule.

Rule #2: All players can only use the backhand of their stick blades at all times.

Goal: To simulate a game situation where players are forced to work on their forehand and backhand puck control.

4) HOT PUCK:

Rule: All players must make one touch passes. Players are not allowed to stickhandle or skate with the puck.

Goal: To simulate a game situation where players are working to find open ice and making accurate passes.

Tip: You can use the game “Hot Potato” as an example. The puck is too hot and shouldn’t be on their stick for too long.

5) AROUND THE WORLD:

Rule: All players on each team MUST touch the puck once before they can shoot the puck on the opposing net.

Goal: To simulate a game situation where players work on passing and receiving the puck, as well as begin to experiment on how to skillfully stick check and support the puck carrier.

Tip: Encourage the players to communicate with their teammates. Players can touch the puck more than once.

6) CHECKING AND DEFENDING:

Rule: All players on one team play with their stick’s upside down. All players on the other team are playing with their sticks normally. After a few minutes, have the teams switch which way they are using their sticks.

Goal: To allow offensive players to work on stick handling and passing while defensive players work on proper body positioning and stick checking skills.

Variation: Have one team defend/play without sticks. Encourage them to use their body and work on positioning.

Tip: Encourage defensive players to watch their opponents (not the puck) and to lift sticks/stick check correctly when their sticks are upside down.

7) GRETZKY'S OFFICE:

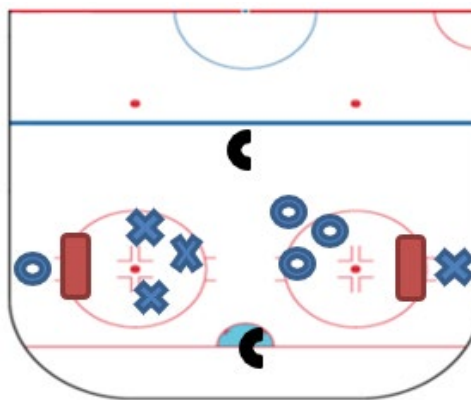
Rule #1: One player on each team stands behind the opposing team's net as the "**Gretzky player**".

Rule #2: The Gretzky player cannot be pressured and cannot leave from behind the net, but they can skate around the ice behind the net to get open and to create better passing plays/opportunities for their teammates.

Rule #3: Before a team can shoot on their opposing net, players must make a pass to their "Gretzky player" and have their "Gretzky player" make a return pass.

Goal: To simulate a game situation that forces players to develop offensive creativity skills while passing and shooting the puck quickly. Players must work to find open space on the ice so their Gretzky player can pass them the puck.

Variation: The Gretzky Player can only make passes using their backhand.



8) REGROUP GAME:

Rule #1: One player on each team is behind their own net as the "**Regroup player**".

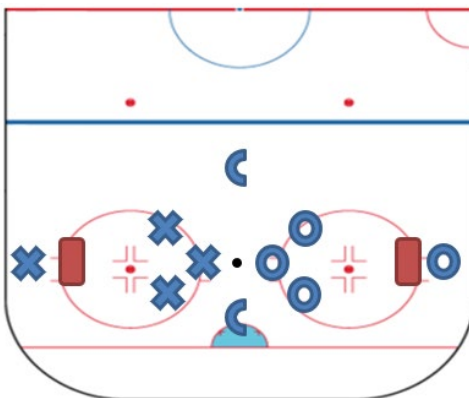
Rule #2: "Regroup players" cannot be pressured and cannot leave from behind the net. But they can skate around the ice behind their net to get open and to create better passing plays/opportunities for their teammates.

Rule #3: Before a team can shoot on their opposing net, they must pass to their "Regroup player" and have their "Regroup player" make a return pass to them.

Goal: To make players work on breaking out or regrouping by passing the puck up ice. Players must work to find open space so their Regroup player can pass them the puck.

Variation: The regroup player can only make passes using their backhand.

Tip: Encourage the 'Regroup Player' to pass to a different teammate each time they regroup.



9) CHERRY PICKER:

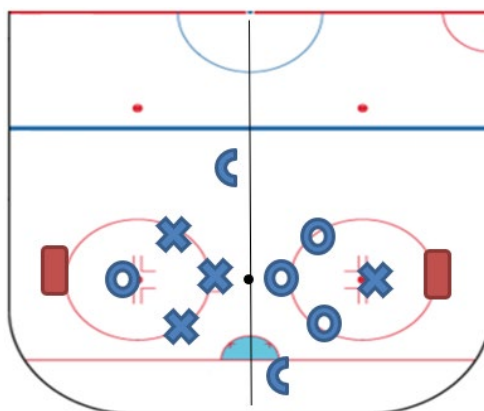
Rule #1: One player on each team is always on offense as a “Cherry picker”.

Rule #2: The “Cherry pickers” are always on offense and cannot cross the dividing line to go play defense in their end.

Rule #3: After the defensive team forces a turnover, they can move the puck up the ice to their “Cherry picker” or skate the puck.

Goal: To simulate a game situation in which players are given the opportunity to execute and defend a 4 on 3 in a small area.

Variation: Have the ‘Cherry Picker’ shoot on the net only using their backhand.

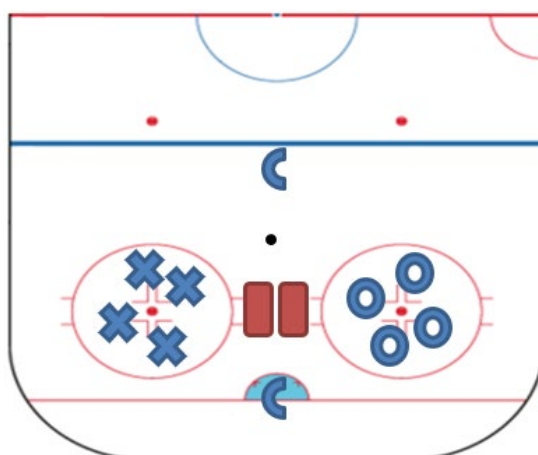


10) BACK-TO-BACK GAME:

Rule: Nets are placed back-to-back between the face-off circles. A 4 on 4 game occurs where players attack the nets opposite of the side they began. Make sure players know what net they are attacking.

Goal: To develop offensive creativity. Players need to find open ice and move the puck around with their teammates.

Tip: Encourage the players to be moving continuously. Creating space and getting open to receive a pass is important in this game.

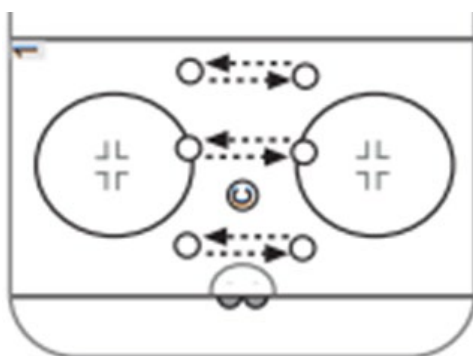


TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES

A selection of fun activities to encourage the players to work together and support each other.

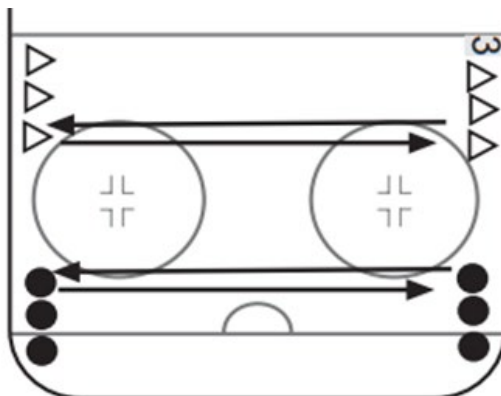
1) PARTNER STICK CATCH

Rule: Players partner up and stand across from each other (about a stick length apart to start). Players turn their sticks upside down and hold it upright beside their body. On the coach's command, both players release their grip on the stick and try to skate over and catch their partner's stick before it hits the ice. If the players are successful at catching the sticks, they can move farther apart for a challenge.



2) STICK RELAY RACE

Rule: Split players into 2 teams. Each team then divides their players so that half are at each end of the ice (see diagram). On the whistle the first player in line skates the length of the ice and hands his stick to his teammate at the front of the line at the far boards. The teammate then skates with 2 sticks across the zone and hands the two sticks to the next player in line who then carries 3 sticks and so on. The first team with all their sticks in one place wins.

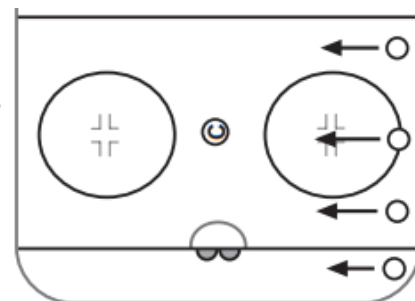


TAG GAMES

A selection of fun games to promote skating in different directions, edge work, and keeping your eyes up.

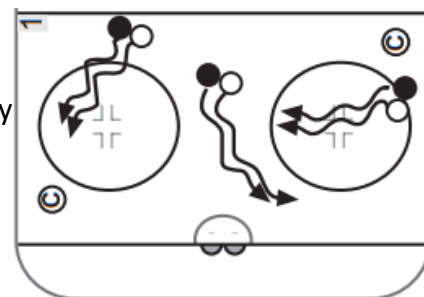
1) BRITISH BULLDOG

Rule: Have players line up on the boards. On coach's signal, players skate from one end to the other, trying not to get caught/tagged. If players get tagged, they then go to center and help coaches catch other players. This can also be done while stickhandling pucks.



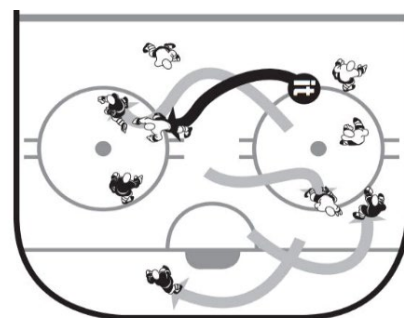
2) PARTNER TAG

Rule: Split the players up into partners. Players decide who will start the game as the "tagger". All players skate around at the same time while only trying to tag their partner. Once they tag their partner, they switch roles.



3) FREEZE TAG

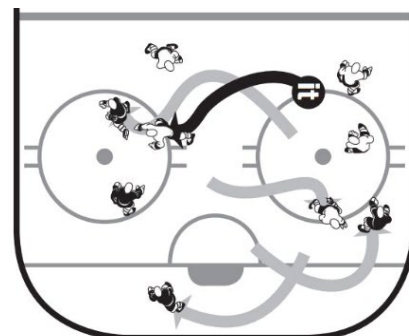
Rule: Players spread out across one third of the ice surface. Denote either a coach or a player as "it." All other players skate within the designated area avoiding the tag. If they get tagged, they are frozen with their arms out. Another player unfreezes them by skating underneath their arms. The game is over when all players are frozen.



4) SKILL TAG

Rule: Players spread out across one third of the ice surface. Denote a player as "it." All other players skate within the designated area avoiding the tag. If they get tagged, they must go see the coach, where the coach will give them a "skill" to perform. Once the player has completed the skill they can join back into the game. Example of skills to perform:

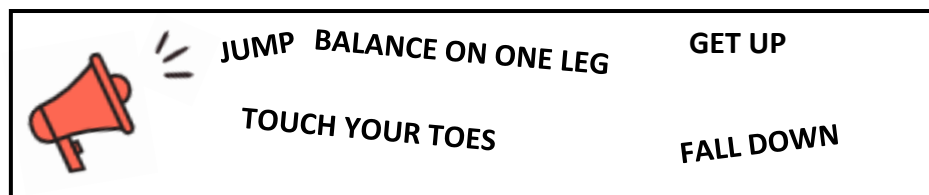
- Balance on one leg for 5 seconds
- Jump 5 times
- Do 10 sit ups
- Spell your name backwards



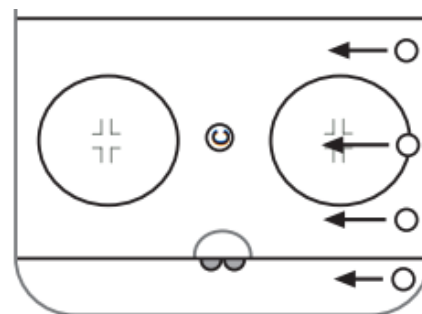
SKILL CHECK ACTIVITIES

1) SIMON SAYS

Rule: Have the group "follow the leader/coach" by using classic Simon says. Coaches can include commands like:



When a player follows the command when a coach does not say Simon says, have the player start back at the boards.



2) RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

Rule: Using one third of the rink, all players start against the boards. The coach starts out between the faceoff circles and begins yelling out commands for the players to follow. The commands are:



RED LIGHT: STOP

YELLOW LIGHT: GLIDE

GREEN LIGHT: SKATE FORWARD

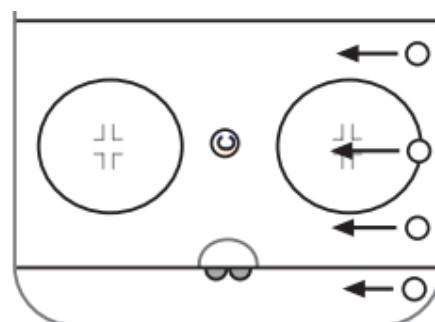
Goal: Encourages players to practice their hockey stop and improves their balance.

Variation 1: Add different colored traffic lights with different skills. Example:

Blue Light = Touch Your Toes

Pink Light = 2 Foot Jump

Variation 2: Make players carry pucks.



ACTIVITIES WITH PUCKS

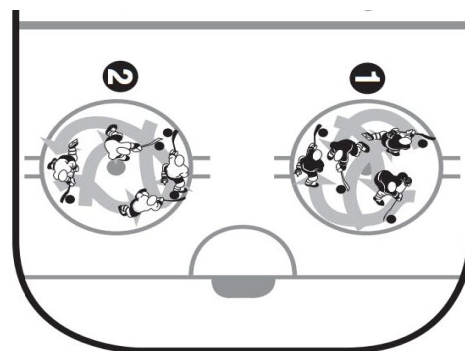
1) CHAOS DRILL

Rule #1: Divide the players into two groups. Players begin the drill in a face-off circle, each with a puck. The players can skate in any direction, keeping their heads up and staying inside the circle.

Rule #2: While skating around, the players try to knock their opponent's puck out of the face-off circle while protecting their own puck.

Rule #3: After a few minutes, place all the remaining players in one circle. Last player remaining with their puck is the winner.

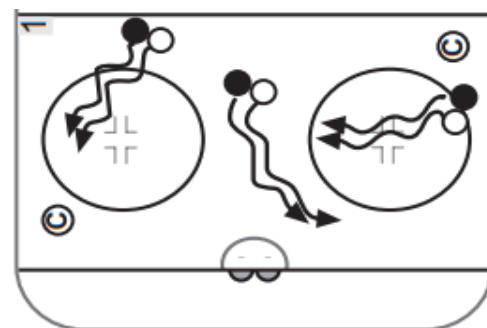
Goal: Emphasize the importance of puck control, protection, and keeping your head up in a confined area.



2) RABBIT AND COYOTE

Rule: Divide players into groups of two. One player has a puck, second player does not. On whistle, player with the puck skates around the ice in all different directions, while second player tries to get the puck away. If second player steals the puck away, the players reverse roles.

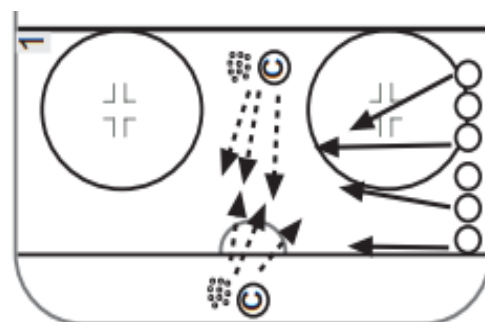
Goal: Emphasize quick and deceptive skating, puck control and protection, while being aware of your surroundings.



3) ASTEROIDS

Rule: Have players line up on the boards. On command, players skate from one end to the other while coaches, who are on the blue line or goal line with pucks, shoot pucks at the player's skates. If a player gets hit, then they help the coaches. Repeat until one player remains. Can also have the players stickhandle a puck while skating.

Goal: Emphasize speed, eyes up and ice awareness.



Practice Planning Resource for Coaches

The greatest opportunity for coaches to impact development is in practice. By effectively using the space and time available, a practice can be used to teach new skills, reinforce skills that have already been taught and give players the maximum amount of puck touches and meaningful interaction with their teammates.

Hockey Canada drill hub

Hockey Canada's 32 Under-9 practice plans map out easy-to-follow ice sessions. U9 hockey players need to progress through these practices to ensure they are exposed to age-appropriate drills and activities that will develop their confidence. Use these complete practice plans or choose your favourite drills to build a practice for your U9 team. **You can access all 32 of these U9 practice plans online for free on Hockey Canada's drill-hub website at:**

<https://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/hockey-programs/drill-hub/under-9>

Hockey Canada network app

Hockey Canada is committed to supporting you, the U9 Coach by connecting you to resources that will allow you have maximized success. The Hockey Canada Network App is filled with articles, practice plans, drills, skills videos and tips that you can access on your tablet or phone. The App is very user friendly and even has tutorials that will help you to make the best use of the resource. Coaches will have the ability to access plans, videos and articles that will help them navigate the hockey season.

The Hockey Canada Network App has everything you need:

Skills: Over 300 videos to help players develop their skills, covering hockey fundamentals for all ages.

- Skating and agility, stickhandling and shooting—no player is too advanced or too old to work on hockey basics. The Hockey Canada Network offers a library of videos and articles to help players properly develop and improve their skills on and off the ice.

Drills: Over 1,000 drill videos, diagrams and descriptions, helping coaches get the most out of practice time.

- Practice makes perfect. The Hockey Canada Network App is loaded with drills to help coaches run more effective practices. Whether your goal is to develop individual skills, improve conditioning or build on team tactics, there are drills for teams at any level to improve their game.

Plans: Short- and long-term practice plans designed by some of Canada's best coaches.

- In addition to hundreds of drills, the Hockey Canada Network App offers comprehensive practice plans. Each plan gives you a series of drills and training advice to use within a single practice, or over several weeks. These plans were created by our most experienced and knowledgeable coaches and trainers.

Coaching: Essentials for anyone looking to get involved or advance their own coaching careers.

- Every season, thousands of coaches across Canada volunteer their time to step behind the bench. The Hockey Canada Network App is the perfect assistant for new and experienced coaches, giving you information on player development, certification and other valuable resources.

Experts: Over a century of experience and the largest network of hockey professionals in the world.

- We've dedicated the last 100 years to growing this sport and developing young players. The videos and articles in the Hockey Canada Network App were created by experienced coaches and top players, as well as trainers, nutritionists, sports psychologists and other leading experts.

Important Rules for Under-9 Hockey Parents

The following 10 rules for hockey parents reflect literature by fitness expert Lloyd Percival. Although his rules were initially publicized in 1987, the information below still applies to the contemporary minor hockey system:

1. Make sure your child knows that win or lose, you love them. Let them know that you appreciate their efforts and you won't be disappointed in them if they fail. Be the person in their life that they can always look to for support.
2. Try to be completely honest with yourself about your child's athletic capability, competitive attitude, and level of skill. Although parents should always encourage and support their child, it is crucial to be aware and realistic of their abilities and desires.
3. Be helpful, but don't coach your child on the way to the game or at the breakfast table. Think how tough it must be on them to be continually inundated with advice, pep talks, and criticism.
4. Teach your child to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying," and to be constantly working to improve their skills. Help them to develop a healthy competitive attitude, a "feel" for competing, for trying hard, and for having fun while doing so.
5. Try not to live your life through your child. Yes, your children are an extension of you. But, don't assume they feel the same way you did, or have the same desires or attitudes. Don't push them in the direction that will give you the most satisfaction.
6. Don't compete with your child's coach. A coach may become a hero to them for a while, someone who can do no wrong, and you may find that hard to take. Or, if your child may become disenchanted with the coach, don't side with them against the coach. Talk to your child about the importance of learning how to handle problems and how to react to criticism. Try to help them understand the necessity for discipline, rules, and regulations.
7. Don't compare your child to other players on their team. If they tend to resent the treatment they get from the coach or if they are jealous of the approval other players

get, encourage them to work harder and work on their weaknesses so they can develop into a better player. Remember, if you are over protective, you will perpetuate the problem.

8. Get to know your child's coach. Make sure you approve of their attitude and ethics. A coach can be very influential, and you should know what their values are so you can decide whether or not you want them passed on to your child.
9. Remember that children tend to exaggerate when they are praised and when they are criticized. Temper your reactions to the stories your child brings home from the rink. Don't criticize them for exaggerating, but don't over-react to the stories they tell you.
10. Teach your child that making mistakes when they try their best is common and will only help them in the future. In order to succeed, you cannot be afraid to fail.

Key note: Remember to enjoy your children as much as possible. They are young for such a short time. Do not rush them through childhood – it is a very brief but very important period of time in their lives.

Conclusion

Hockey Winnipeg is committed to supporting our coaches, hockey players, and officials every step of the way. Initiatives like the Under-9 half-ice program are designed and implemented with one major goal in mind: to grow the game of hockey. By working as a team and remembering that this structure focuses on development and fun, we can all make this U9 half-ice program a positive experience for everyone involved.



www.hockeywinnipeg.ca



www.hockeymanitoba.ca



www.hockeycanada.ca

Hockey Winnipeg wishes you all the best for this upcoming season, and as always, HAVE FUN!